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UNCLAS MANAMA 001924

SIPDIS

ECA PHARRISON, JSUPPLEE, BOLLISON
ECA/PE/C/CU DSCHUMAN; NEA/ARP DBURNS
NEA/PPD MQUINN, PAGNEW, CWHITTLESEY

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [SCUL](#) [SOCL](#) [OEXC](#) [KPAO](#) [BA](#)

SUBJECT: Sports Programming Works

11. (U) The Bahraini reaction to the highly successful visit of former Georgetown University Basketball players Omari Faulkner and Courtland Freeman was summed up by the Bahrain's National Basketball Team coach: "More sports programs are needed to foster greater dialogue." The two Cultural Envoys did a masterful job in engaging with a young Bahraini audience, GoB Officials, and Bahraini teachers and coaches by using basketball as a common language. During their November 29 - December 2 visit to Bahrain, the Cultural Envoys were hosted by the President of the Bahrain Basketball Association, who told APAO that a visit like this is "long overdue and something that must continue."

12. (U) Mr. Faulkner and Mr. Freeman were a "dream team" as cultural envoys with natural ability to connect with others. Among a younger audience they spoke about the value of sports in building determination, instilling a spirit of teamwork, and breaking down cultural barriers. The two visitors led practices with teams of teenagers at several athletic clubs. At the Muharrag Club, one of Bahrain's largest sports clubs, the young players refused to leave the practice hall and pleaded with their parents to watch them play with their "new American friends."

13. (U) The cultural envoys discussed their experience as students and players at a NCAA Division I University and encouraged Bahrainis to apply for Post's exchange opportunities to study at universities in the U.S. The players participated in drills and scrimmages with the Bahrain National Basketball Team. The coach excitedly stated, "this is what we aim for, basketball players of all cultures enjoying a common passion for sports together."

14. (U) The Cultural Envoys received wide media coverage. Articles about their events appeared in both the Arabic and English daily newspapers. One Arabic newspaper called the visit a new opportunity for cultural dialogue with sports as the common language. In addition, a profile of the athletes and their experience in Bahrain will be featured in the upcoming edition of Bahrain's "Confidential Magazine." The players also participated in a live interview with Radio Bahrain, which targets a young audience.

15. (U) COMMENT: Post strongly encourages more cultural sports programs. This event was a large success due to the charisma, professionalism, and interpersonal skills of Mr. Freeman and Mr. Faulkner and because of the power of sports to reach beyond cultural and political barriers. At a time when U.S. policies face challenges, the common interest in the ideals of teamwork, dedication, and sacrifice involved in athletics and the "appreciation for the game" offers a common ground. The principal of a secondary school told the PAO, "these are the types of programs that can rebuild what terrorism has tried to destroy." END COMMENT.

Monroe